



Executive Summary



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RUSSIAN INTERESTS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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At the time of writing, Russian foreign policy is preoccupied with a number of immediate concerns that have eclipsed any obvious attention to Sub-Saharan Africa in high-level public diplomacy since 2009. These include the aftermath of the Arab Spring in the Middle East, the conflict in Syria, relations with Europe and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)—particularly regarding post-2014 security in Afghanistan and finding a compromise on European missile defense following the March 2013 announcement of Phase 4 cancellation—and investing considerable soft power capital in the near abroad. However, while Africa may not be an immediate policy priority, at a longer-term strategic level, the desire remains for Moscow to establish and maintain a clearer and more defined presence in the region.

Russian diplomacy is working hard to overcome a sense of abandonment by Russia of some African nations following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and trust between Russia and Sub-Saharan African nations is still being re-established. The post-Soviet hiatus in relations between Russia and Africa was replaced in the early 2000s by a determination to reclaim a footprint in the region, spurred by concern that China, India, Brazil, and especially the United States, were intensifying their involvement there in order to secure access to natural resources and energy reserves. Russia's dependency on natural resources to maintain its state budget and ensure future reserves for its export-based economy

will ensure Moscow's continued interest in Sub-Saharan Africa, and a visible return to prominence on the list of Russia's foreign policy priorities should be expected.

This driver for Russian presence and influence in African has implications for U.S. policy and interests. Given the scope for direct competition with Russia, allegiances in sub-Saharan Africa have the potential to become a strategic policy concern for the U.S. Army, the U.S. African Command (AFRICOM), the Pentagon, and U.S. policymakers. While this source of competition for primary influence in Africa will persist, opportunities do still exist for cooperation on Africa-related issues between the United States and Russia.

Moscow's rising alarm over terrorist organizations' global freedom of movement and encroachment of terrorist activity toward Russian borders is a fundamental cause for concern in Russia's view of the world, including Africa. This was highlighted as a specific issue by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in January 2013, discussing the increased terrorist activity in the "vacuum of power" in northern Mali, as well as the increase of illegal weapons trafficking in Libya affecting the stability of the region. This overlap of interests with the United States and AFRICOM is clear. At the same time, however, policy and planning for AFRICOM needs to take into account relative perceptions of U.S. and Russian involvement in Africa, which could

have significant impacts as the United States increases military cooperation with African states. African suspicion of U.S. intentions is reinforced by the legacy of support from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) for anti-colonial movements—and given recent interventions in the Middle East led by the United States and supported by a range of European former imperial powers, it is easy to portray the United States as a neo-colonialist actor in Africa. U.S. military presence is not necessarily automatically preferable for African states to that of Russia and China, and Russia may be able to win influence in these states through attractive arms deals and investment for natural resource extraction. Declaratory policy on the objectives and rationale for AFRICOM, as well as planning for future development of the command, should therefore remain sensitive to these African perceptions and to the attraction—historical or otherwise—of Russia as an alternative.

Although Russia's trade and investment footprint in Africa is not as widespread as that of China, cultivating mineral resources and retaining control over sources of gas and oil is a key driver for Moscow. Russia's energy doctrine is designed to be expansionist, seeking control over resources to meet energy demands—as Russia's natural gas and oil reserves continue to diminish, Russia will need to find other sources of energy. Russia also needs to export natural gas and oil in order to support the Russian economy and enhance the dependence of other states on Russian energy reserves. Gazprom's interests in the planned Trans-Saharan gas pipeline, and Russian involvement in the Angolan oil sector, carry potential implications for the energy security of the United States and its European allies, particularly in the context of security of supply. Given the differing approaches to, and even definitions of, energy security between Russia on the one hand and the United States and its Euro-Atlantic allies on the other, control of African energy resources by Russian majors should be observed closely and the long-term implications considered with as much attention as is given to similar acquisition programs by

China. Russian interests in uranium mining may also have strategic implications, as U.S. foreign policy continues to prioritize nonproliferation of nuclear materials.

The importance of Russia as a trading partner to African countries is slight. Bilateral trade between Russia and Africa reached a peak of \$7.3 billion in 2008, a minuscule figure compared to the equivalent indicators for the United States and China. Russian and African direct trade is therefore significantly underdeveloped, compared to investment in resource extraction and cooperation on the associated financing. One area of significant interest, however, is the arms trade.

Besides the United States, Russia's primary competitor in the arms market in Africa since the fall of the USSR has been China. Like China, Russia remains wary of any arms control treaty to include binding rules on international human rights, international humanitarian law, and socio-economic development. Moscow has expressed concern that these treaties could be used as tools for the West to restrict the Russian export market in order to retain export hegemony, since Russia has often been accused of supplying arms to African countries where internal conflict and ethnic strife end in severe human rights violations. Russia continues to supply helicopter gunships to Sudan, where they have been used to attack civilians in Darfur and Southern Kordofan—with little of the international opposition that was sparked by a repair contract for similar helicopters supplied to the Assad regime in Syria. Russian suspicion that human rights concerns are used as a pretext to disrupt arms sales were heightened by the experience of losing business with a key trading partner following the change of regime in Libya. Although Libya is not a sub-Saharan nation, the example is worth considering, as it predicates the likely future Russian response to similar situations that could potentially arise in Southern Africa.

Multilateral diplomacy involving Russia and South Africa is likely to be an area of developing interest. Russia is attracted by the notion of cooperation in Africa between

countries making up the BRICS virtual group of nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) with supposedly similar economies. Two benefits for Russia are an enhanced ability to keep a wary eye on the activities of other BRICS states in Africa, and the potential creation of a cohesive block of states to counter U.S./Western influence both in the United Nations (UN) and in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Overall, therefore, Russian diplomatic and economic activity in southern Africa should receive continuing attention from U.S. policymakers due to its direct relevance to a number of U.S. strategic concerns.

Summary of Recommendations.

- Moscow shares the U.S. concern for global stability, especially in the Middle East and Africa, where instability could directly affect Russian business and resource investment. Russian alarm over freedom of movement for terrorist organizations in ungoverned or lightly governed spaces leads to a clear and exploitable overlap of interests with AFRICOM's remit.
- The actions and declaratory policy of AFRICOM should continue to be sensitive to perceptions in African nations, which diverge significantly from the U.S. view. In particular, it should be recognized that a preference for U.S. military presence over that of Russia or China is not axiomatic. Far from being perceived as a security benefit, the creation of AFRICOM was a cause for alarm among African nations. AFRICOM suffers in particular from a perceived deficit of legitimacy among leadership elites in some African states, compounded in some cases by more positive fond memories of Soviet connections among the leadership generation.
- Russian interests in the mineral and energy sectors in Africa are currently closely targeted and not widespread, but continued attention is required to

their future development and potential implications for the energy security of the United States and its European allies. In addition, Russian interests in uranium mining should be followed closely while U.S. foreign policy continues to prioritize nonproliferation of nuclear materials.

- Policymakers should remain sensitive to, or at least aware of, Russian perceptions of U.S. and NATO actions. U.S. and NATO activities that appear innocent from a Euro-Atlantic perspective can be perceived as deeply troubling, destabilizing, and even threatening when viewed from Moscow, especially when they involve an extension of NATO's reach and influence. As U.S. interests and presence in Africa expand, Moscow will therefore likely respond with an even more assertive policy toward increasing presence and influence in Africa to counter the perceived threat of U.S. expansionism. Broadening or enhancement of U.S. involvement with African states, especially if this carries a military dimension as through AFRICOM or NATO, can be expected to provoke a defensive response from Russia, and this potential response should be considered carefully in order to reduce the transactional cost of Russian opposition or obstructionism.
- Neither China nor Russia press African governments on issues of corruption, human rights, or democracy, and they can therefore appear a more attractive partner in the short term than the United States. Nevertheless, Sub-Saharan Africa needs, and is looking for, a dependable ally, not just the highest bidder investor. U.S. policy will be most successful through prioritizing interests and consistently heavily investing in top priority areas to gain the trust not only of the governments currently in power, but also, and more importantly, of the next generations of leaders in these nations.

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